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ABSTRACT

Evidence exists that fathers have a potent influence on the sex-role adoption of their sons and daughters and that fathers tend to reinforce sex-role stereotypes of masculinity in their sons and femininity in their daughters. Crucial events appear to take place at the start of the second year of life. At this time, fathers begin to treat their sons and daughters differently, while mothers continue to treat infants of both sexes similarly. From the time their daughters are 3 years of age, fathers tend to interact in expressive rather than instrumental ways. When fathers do behave instrumentally, their behavior is ineffective and confusing. In later years, the pattern continues, with girls eliciting more affection from their fathers and receiving less encouragement for independent achievements. This pattern has held up to a degree even in a sample of nontraditional fathers who had accepted greater child care roles. Although fathers who were their daughters' primary caregivers made a greater effort than did traditional fathers to foster their daughters' intellectual growth, these fathers' behavior still varied according to the sex of the child and remained consistent with sex-role stereotypes. (RH)

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FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Symposium Presented at

The Greater Boston Fatherhood Forum

June 16, 1984

Ronald F. Levant, Moderator

Panelists:

Gay Forbes
Evan Longin
Melissa Longin
Jack Weltner
Julie Weltner
Laura Weltner

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Overview

Until recently, the role of the father in the family was virtually ignored by researchers, and his participation in child care was considered "inappropriate" and "unmanly" (Nash, 1965; Josselyn, 1956). In a recent paper it was suggested that the lack of research attention to the fathers' role may have been influenced by Freud's (1963) and Parsons' (1955) theories, which either portrayed the father as functioning primarily in external roles, or limited his internal family role to that of disciplinarian (Levant, 1980). However, the importance of the father's role in child development has gained increasing recognition during the 1970's, in what Lamb (1979) has called an "era of paternal rediscovery" (Biller, 1971, 1974; Lynn, 1974; Lamb, 1976a). In study after study, the importance of the father's warmth and involvement has been found, as have the significant effects of the father on his children's cognitive and social development, particularly their sex role adoption (Lamb, 1976a, 1981). The literature on the father's role in child development that has been generated in the past ten years is now quite large; however, little on it has to do with the father-daughter relationship, and less still is concerned with that relationship beyond infancy.

Thus, it is not surprising that the father-daughter relationship has been termed the "forgotten relationship" in a recent review of the literature (Lamb, Owen, & Chase-Lansdale, 1979). However, the evidence

that exists indicates that fathers have a potent influence on the sex role adoption of both their sons and their daughters, and that fathers tend to reinforce sex role stereotypes of masculinity in their sons and femininity in their daughters.

The crucial events appear to take place at the start of the second year of life, when fathers begin to treat their sons and daughters differently, while mothers continue to treat infants of both sexes similarly. Studies by Lamb (1977a, 1976) and Kotelchuck (1976) have found that fathers dramatically increase the amount of attention they pay to their sons in the thirteenth month, interacting with them twice as frequently as they interact with their daughters, and about twice as often as mothers interact with either their sons or their daughters in comparable time periods. The net effect is to increase the salience of fathers in the lives of their sons, and of mothers in the lives of their daughters. These studies are only descriptive; however, using a social learning model, Lamb, et al. (1979) have proposed that the father's behavior in the thirteenth month ensures that the same-sex parent becomes a particularly salient role model, thus fostering the adoption of sex-typed role behavior. This hypothesis receives further support from the findings that fathers and mothers behave in sex-differentiated ways during the infant's first year of life.

In the case of preschool children, observational studies indicate that fathers not only interact less frequently with their daughters, but that they treat them differently than their sons. From three years on, fathers tend to interact in expressive rather than instrumental ways with their daughters (Harrington, Block & Block, 1975; Osofsky & O'Connell, 1972), and when they do behave instrumentally (i.e., task-oriented), their behavior is ineffective and confusing (Radin, 1976). In learning situations, fathers appear more concerned with making the task enjoyable than with facilitating

their daughter's mastery of the task. In the Harrington, et al. (1975) study, fathers sought to protect their daughters from failure; whereas, in the Osofsky and O'Connell (1972) study, fathers either provided too much direction or withdrew completely, failing in either case to facilitate achievement or even to convey expectations that the child should seek mastery. In sum, the evidence is to be sought via affective relationships rather than through independent achievement.

In the case of older children observational studies are few and far between. However, questionnaire and interview studies of parents and of daughters provide some information about the father-daughter relationship in later years. Block (1979) found that both parents emphasized achievement and competition in their sons more than their daughters; furthermore, both parents reported being more willing to tolerate aggression, less tolerant of affect expression, and more likely to use firm discipline with their sons as compared with their daughters. Fathers put particular emphasis on independence and personal responsibility in their sons. In contrast, both parents expected trust, truthfulness, and "ladylike behavior" from their daughters, and expressed more warmth toward them. Independent samples of college women reported that their fathers were warm and involved, encouraged femininity, but either failed to encourage or discouraged autonomy and achievement. Thus, although fathers may be more involved in the socialization of their sons, they are not uninvolved with their daughters. The involvement is of a different type, with girls eliciting more affection and receiving less encouragement of independent achievements.

This pattern holds up to a degree even in a sample of non-traditional fathers who have accepted greater child care roles. Radin's (1982) sample included three groups of families: Father as the prime care-giver; mother as prime care-giver; and shared child care responsibilities. Using a

questionnaire she found that men who are heavily involved in raising their preschoolers will spend more time in efforts to stimulate their children's cognitive growth than will less-involved fathers. However, their direct teaching activities appear to be focused on their sons rather than their daughters. Thus, although prime care-giving fathers make a greater effort than do traditional fathers to foster their daughter's intellectual growth, their behavior still varies according to the sex of child, and is still consistent with sex role stereotypes. However, it should be pointed out that Radin's sample of prime care-giving and role-sharing fathers, though non-traditional in their choice of role behavior, still expressed stereotyped sex role attitudes, scoring in the stereotyped masculine range on a questionnaire assessing self-perception of sex role identification. The father's attitudes toward women in traditional and non-traditional roles was not assessed. This is unfortunate, because it would have been interesting to see if the fathers' behavior and attitudes were congruent in this more specific and focussed domain.

Thus the available literature indicates that the father has a potent effect on influencing his daughter's adoption of a stereotyped sex role, encouraging friendliness and interpersonal skills through his warmth in interacting with her, and discouraging independence and task mastery. This set of socialization behaviors is becoming dysfunctional in contemporary American society, as women increasingly enter the work force or adopt careers, a trend which is projected to increase through the current decade (Masnick & Bane, 1980). Simultaneously, men are reexamining their views on masculinity, and thinking through alternative options for role behavior (Fasteau, 1975; Pleck, 1981). Thus, two related questions arise: (1) Is this pattern of sex role socialization changing? (2) Are there conditions under which fathers engage in less sex-typed socialization behaviors?

In today's workshop we will consider these questions and several others using as datum the experiences of members of three families at several stages of the life cycle: pre-adolescence, late adolescense/ early adulthood, and established adulthood.

At this point I would like to introduce our panelists:

Evan Longin, Ed.D., is senior associate in a comprehensive practice of family-oriented psychology in Brookline and Salem. A graduate of Boston University's Program in Counseling Psychology, Dr. Longin is a diplomate of both the American Board of Family Psychology and the American Board of Professional Psychology. Divorced several years ago, he maintained a pattern of joint custody with his former wife. Recently re-married, he is now living through the vicissitudes of a "blended family".

Melissa Longin is a ten year old student of the fifth grade in Marblehead. She is presently in the talented and gifted program. Melissa is a busy child: she plays on the community Soccer league, studies piano, and attends Hebrew School.

Jack Weltner, M.D., is a child psychiatrist practicing in Marblehead, and is the director of the North Shore Family Resource Center. A graduate with honors from Harvard Medical School, he is a diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. He and his wife Linda have co-parented their two daughters diligently for the past two decades.

Julie Weltner is just graduating Marblehead High School. She has been a board member at the Marblehead Community Counseling Center, and has been involved in ~~their peer~~ student counseling ~~programs~~ at the High School.

Laura Weltner, a sophomore at Brown University, is wending her way toward a career in clinical psychology. Last summer, she volunteered as a child care worker with emotionally abused children at North Shore Children's Hospital.

Gay Forbes, J.D., is a lawyer in her early thirties, who earned her law degree from Boston College. She has served as a staff attorney in legal services, specializing in the housing issues for the poor, and is now working on her own. Her father, 80 years old, is also an attorney, and a "very good friend".

I am Ron Levant, Ed.D., a member of the Counseling Psychology faculty and Director of the Fatherhood Project at Boston University. I earned my degree from Harvard, and I am a diplomate of the American Board of Family Psychology. My 20 year old daughter Caren is going to college in New York City; I have played a large role in her life subsequent to my divorce from my first wife.

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